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By JOHN ADLER

Op-Ed

When I first took office in January, our country was in the throes of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. The effects spilled from Wall Street to Main Street, and I saw New Jersey families and communities struggling every day. Whether it was a lack of available credit for small businesses, diminished retirement accounts, or falling home prices, American confidence was down and the economy needed a substantial jolt.

I was elected to represent the families, veterans, seniors and small business owners in Burlington, Camden and Ocean counties. That's why I voted in favor of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, legislation that is directing funds into New Jersey's economy, creating or saving 100,000 jobs in our state.

It will take time to turn our economy around, but since passing the recovery package, we have begun to see some positive signs. Earlier this summer, seniors and disabled veterans across New Jersey received a \$250 economic recovery payment.

When I read the first draft of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, I realized seniors and veterans had been left out. I am proud that one of my first acts in Congress was to revise the bill to include tax relief for millions of older Americans and national heroes.

The Making Work Pay Tax Cut, also included in the recovery package, provided immediate tax relief to about 95 percent of American workers and their families through a \$400 tax credit per worker. The bill also spurred investment by doubling the amount small businesses are permitted to deduct from their taxes after making capital investments and purchasing new equipment.

New Jersey residents and small business owners already pay too much in taxes. In order to provide some relief, we need to continue to lower taxes and get more money back into the market place.

During the next few months, you will see more funding from Washington invested in our region's infrastructure, schools and hospitals. Those investments will create jobs, drive money into the economy, support local manufacturers and provide South Jersey townships with a burst of new funding. More recently, I have met with first responders in Burlington, Camden and Ocean Counties, urging them to apply for federal grants that will put more money toward our public safety.

All of these projects will help to jump start our local economies, but we nevertheless have to ensure that the process is transparent, and the money is allocated quickly and efficiently.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed at a time when our country's economy needed a boost, and we need to ensure that every dollar is spent wisely. I am committed to rooting out waste, fraud and abuse, and I welcome your ideas.

Now that Washington has taken unprecedented steps to revive the economy, it is time to turn, once again, to the values that make America great: hard work and free enterprise. We must not allow government spending to crowd out the private sector during this crucial time. We are beginning to see the recovery act pay dividends, but there is still more for each of us to do to make sure the economy works once again for middle class families, seniors, and small businesses.